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Cecchi aims for new approach to UK market

by Rupert Millar

One of Tuscany's leading producers, Famiglia Cecchi, is gearing up for a new approach to the UK market with a stronger branded presence and fresher take on the Tuscan classics – especially Chianti Classico.



A large producer with both négociant and domain labels in the key Tuscan DOC(G)s of Chianti, Chianti Classico, Morellino di Scansano, Maremma and Vernaccia di San Gimignano, Famiglia Cecchi does have quite a strong presence in the UK already but largely through own-labels in multiple grocers such as Sainsbury's.

The company is keen, however, to take a renewed run at the market with more of its own, Cecchi-branded, labels in major multiples and its domain wines in the on-trade and independents.

Although Chianti and Chianti Classico are reasonably well-known regions in the UK, memories of the straw-bottomed *fiascos* and some fairly extracted and 'dusty' and 'rustic' wines have dogged the category for many years.

Many of the best-selling Chiantis in the UK by volume in the off-trade tend to be own-label and Famiglia Cecchi believes it has identified the potential for a brand to take a grip of the sector with a fresh, modern take on Tuscan wines.

FAMIGLIA CECCHI

Andrea Cecchi (pictured), who heads the company with his brother Cesare, said there was no doubt that Chianti in particular was “suffering from the mistakes of the past.

“There is an image of Chianti Classico as ‘dusty’ but it’s not anymore. For me, this is the best winemaking area in central Italy [today].”

Since the 1990s the family, and indeed other Chianti Classico producers, have been replanting vineyards, with much greater care given to clonal selection of Sangiovese which itself is back at the heart of blends alongside Colorino and Canaiolo where Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon had sometimes begun to pre-dominate.

Along with gentler extractions and oak treatment, Andrea said that the aim was now to make “gentler, riper [though not over-ripe], more balanced” wines which were nonetheless still authentically ‘Chianti’ with vintage and sense of place to the fore.

Nick Bielak of Vinexus, an Italian specialist founded by Nicholas Belfrage MW which is working with Famiglia Cecchi, said the company has been very successful in the US and Germany and the time had come to bring the brand properly to the UK.

He said: “In the UK an authentic, original branded Chianti doesn’t really exist. No one in Italy has really made a ‘brand’ [in the multiples]. There are lots of invented names and it’s led to a loss of authenticity.

“Andrea has a well-established brand and has done it very well in many parts of the world and that’s the ambition for the UK.”

Furthermore, with its holdings and contacts across Tuscany, he said that Cecchi was able to bring a “whole Tuscan offer” with various wine styles across a wide variety of price points.

“People don’t know what Chianti/Chianti Classico is,” continued Bielak. “It’s a different world of wine to anything on offer.”